

Forest Health Strategy Work Group

May 18, 2004: First Meeting
General Administration Building, 210 11th Ave. SW
Olympia, Washington

Members Present:

Pat McElroy, Chair, DNR Staff
Karen Ripley, Coordinator, DNR Staff
Sasha McGee, Support/Meeting Minutes, DNR Staff
Mike Blankenship, Ferry County Commissioner
Bruce Lippke, UW College of Forest Resources
Rich Fonda, Fire Ecologist, WWU
Ron Shultz, Executive Policy Advisor, Governor's Executive Policy Office
Peter Heide, Washington State Society of American Foresters
Maurice Williamson, Small Forest Landowner Advisory Committee
Bob Gara, Forest Entomologist, UW College of Forest Resources
John St. Pierre, Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation
Mike Petersen, The Lands Council
John Mankowski, WA Dept. of Fish and Wildlife

Absent:

Steve Tveit, Boise Cascade
Barry Moore, WSU Dept. of Natural Resource Science
Rick Brazell, USDA Forest Service

Guests:

Karl Denison (designated back-up for Rick Brazell)
Doug Sutherland, Commissioner of Public Lands
Mark Kahley, DNR Resource Protection Division Manager

CALL TO ORDER:

Pat McElroy called the meeting to order at 9:05am. Introductions of the group members, staff and guests were made. US Fish and Wildlife declined to participate on the work group. A safety briefing was given by Sasha McGee. McElroy asked for members to record additional contact information and back up member designee information on two separate clipboards that were passed around and returned to Karen Ripley.

1 **Group Discussion:**

2 McElroy briefly described the contents of the three ring binders that were given to each group
3 member and stated that the binders will serve as a growing reference. He explained that the
4 committee began forming before the Governor passed the current legislation, 2SSB 6144, and
5 that the committee will act as if the meetings are subject to the open public meeting laws, which
6 will mean publicly disclosing notice of meetings, audio recording the meetings, and taking
7 meeting minutes.

8
9 McElroy stated that it is very important that group members fully understand Section 4 of Bill
10 6144 because it describes how and why the group was formed.

11
12 Karl Denison requested that the draft agendas and meeting minutes be distributed to the
13 designated back-ups as well as to the work group members.

14
15 McElroy presented the group with a history of the current Forest Health situation, opening with
16 the statement that a Forest Health crisis is evident. He explained that the 1951 statutes were not
17 laws that could be enforced, so work was begun by stakeholders to update Forest Health
18 legislation and statutes. There is a range of opinions on dealing with the role of the State in
19 addressing the current Forest Health situation. After sections related to native insect and disease
20 management failed in 2003 legislation, several versions were explored prior to the 2004
21 legislative session, but consensus was not present. Second Substitute Senate Bill 6144 was
22 passed in 2004. This gave rise to the Commissioner of Public Lands, Doug Sutherland,
23 appointing the present work group, meeting for the first time today. McElroy described the tasks
24 that the committee faces.

25
26 McElroy went over the draft committee ground rules, adding that attire worn to meetings does
27 not need to be formal.

28
29 He affirmed that if an issue comes down to a group vote, only work group members (not
30 designated back-ups) will be allowed to vote. Use of work group input on a statewide forest
31 health plan will be at the discretion of Sutherland. Maurice Williamson commented that since

landowners will be those most affected by group decisions, their concerns should be specifically noted in case of a conflicting opinion to a voted decision. McElroy assured Williamson that he does not anticipate a problem, but that it would be acceptable to comply with Williamson's request. McElroy also noted that the largest landowner in Washington, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) State Lands, is not represented in the group. Peter Heide, referring to ground rule number 12, expressed his hope that the group comes to a consensus of the Forest Health plan even if the preferred outcome isn't achieved. John Mankowski agreed with Heide, adding that it will be hard to commit to be an advocate of the agreed upon plan. McElroy suggested removing or modifying ground rule number 12, giving an edited example of "When, if, we reach agreement, members will advocate the plan". Mike Blankenship objected to rule 12, stating that he would like it removed completely due to the fact that in his past a similar rule was used to coerce individuals to go against their wishes. Ron Shultz suggested that the item be discussed at the end of the committee planning session later in the year, rather than being made a rule now. McElroy approved this idea.

Action: Ripley will remove ground rule number 12 prior to the June meeting.

Williamson asked for clarification on rule numbers 8 and 10 and their relation to rule number 9. McElroy indicated that no individual group member should be speaking for another person or represent the group alone.

Action: McElroy and Ripley will take Williamson's concern under advisement and propose a related rule change at the June meeting.

All other ground rules were approved by the group.

Forest Health Presentation:

When Ripley's power point presentation on Forest Health technically failed to work, Mankowski requested that it later be distributed via email to all group members. Ripley continued her informative report verbally, giving the group a background of the Forest Health issue. She explained that it is a new concept that is popular and widely used. 10 years ago, the issue was

1 thought of as “Forest Pests”, but that now there is a broader consideration of how pests and
2 Forest Health relate to improved forest resilience. She elaborated with a triangular approach
3 including ecological, landowner objective and resilience. Ripley referred to two maps, included
4 in the binders, that show insect and disease activity in 2003, pointing out that 1.9 million acres of
5 forests were affected by insect damage and/or disease. This is based on areas which have a
6 group of at least five recently dead trees, 0.25 trees per acre of recently dead trees, or defoliation
7 visible from a low-flying aircraft. The maps were created by the DNR and the Forest Service
8 through an aerial survey using a 4-mile grid pattern flying technique. In the last 5 years, between
9 5 and 10% of Washington forest land have been affected by these levels of insects and diseases
10 each year. In western Washington, the major forest health problem, indicated in green on the
11 map, is due to bear damage in relatively young forests. On the coast, problems with Swiss
12 needle cast disease occur and balsam woolly adelgid is a problem for true fir trees (genus:
13 Abies). In eastern Washington, dry forests have experienced widespread outbreaks of native
14 insects and diseases. The damage cycles are more intense, outbreaks are more frequent, and
15 there are unprecedented levels of disease. Forests are vulnerable due to past harvesting practices
16 and fire suppression success that has increased crowding and the amount of shade-tolerant tree
17 species. Ripley stated that our land is set up for insect problems. Ripley referenced watershed
18 research by Paul Hessberg of the USDA Forest Service when stating that in eastern Washington
19 forests have become more uniform and dense and that the consequences of these structural
20 changes include more extreme fire behavior.

21
22 Ripley acknowledged that the DNR Forest Health Program, which consists of four people, is a
23 small part of a statewide effort to improve Washington’s Forest Health situation. They have
24 worked on insect and disease prevention, education to landowners and publicizing Washington’s
25 situation. Pheromone traps are used to monitor defoliating insects such as budworms. Their
26 annual aerial survey is distributed to extension agents, landowners and people who request the
27 information, as well as being posted on the Internet. If insects are active in a particular area, the
28 Forest Health Program can provide technical assistance for remedies. RCW 76.06 instructs DNR
29 to monitor insects and if a stand of timber or permanent timber production is threatened, DNR
30 establishes a “control district”. Then, DNR provides action recommendations to landowners to
31 rid the affected area of insects. If they don’t do as instructed, DNR is to do so and then bill the

landowner. Due to Forest Practice regulations and other limitations of the law, it is not currently executed. DNR does occasionally coordinate many landowners cooperating to conduct insect control activities.

Mankowski asked if the Forest Pest Condition maps included wildlife effects on the forests. Ripley replied, yes, wildlife damage may be shown, but no wildlife management requirement is conveyed by RCW 76.06. She emphasized that Bill 6144 charges the group to focus on insect, disease, fire, wind and ice storm susceptibility only.

Williamson stated that he would like the group to establish guidelines for landowners to resolve specific forest health issues. John St. Pierre brought up the issue of bear damage to forests to which McElroy assured the group that if their findings conclude that bear issues need to be addressed, the committee can recommend action to Sutherland upon finalization of the forest health plan.

Bob Gara pointed out that it is important for the group to realize that insects, disease, fire, wind and ice concerns are all linked and that the problems feed on each other and that by working on landscape conditions challenges to “chasing pests” can be reduced. McElroy affirmed that the group strategy is to “increase forest resistance and resilience to insects, disease, wind, ice and fire in Washington” as stated in Bill 6144.

Heide expressed interest in learning more about current DNR Forest Stewardship plans and activities that DNR is actively working on.

McElroy informed the group that the 2003-2004 Bark Beetle fund appropriation and Fire Plan funds are sources of federal funds and that the 2005 President’s budget substantially cuts both funds.

Fonda asked for clarification of which insects and/or diseases included on the maps are exotic to Washington. Ripley replied that in western Washington balsam woolly adelgid and in eastern Washington a small number of defoliating insects are exotic.

1
2 St. Pierre mentioned a desire to convince people that our forests need to be returned to their
3 natural state and that by managing Forest Health with that in mind we can hopefully thin out the
4 young, overcrowded, “man-made” forests. Ripley noted that we don’t have a good way of
5 prioritizing areas that need improvements. A 2001 Risk Mapping effort identified areas where at
6 least 25% of trees of one species are anticipated to die over the next 15 years. In current efforts
7 to assess “at-risk forests,” those where 25% of the stand volume is expected to die within 15
8 years are identified. McElroy elaborated that in addition to past harvesting practices and
9 wildfires, an evolving consensus opinion is that we have been through unique wet and mild
10 weather and are now moving into a more normal weather cycle, a much drier environment. We
11 are likely on the cusp of a dry cycle for potentially the next 30 years.

12
13 Ripley summarized her presentation with the idea that, more than ever, there is a common
14 understanding of Forest Health vulnerability and that DNR is not successful alone at managing
15 vegetation. Ripley affirmed that there is a common desire among group members for
16 seeking improvements to the Forest Health situation.

17
18 **Group Discussion:**

19 Lippke commented that the Forest Pest Conditions maps do not represent a homogeneous
20 situation. Mike Petersen said that with working with wildfire prevention, the highest priority
21 challenge is to artificially manage forest thinning, especially around communities. Fonda noted
22 that “nature always wins” and that artificially managing forests will only worsen the effort,
23 adding that it took 100 years to get to the current Forest Health crisis and it will take at least
24 another 100 years to get out of it. Williamson encouraged the group to look for ways to
25 construct baseline data on a quantitative basis in order to seek a strategy because we are lacking
26 in trends and successful approaches. Lippke made a point that to establish funding, we will need
27 to look at the economic aspects of the problem in a broad sense. McElroy said the costs of
28 wildfires are run to the state, but the cost of forest management and insect and disease losses is
29 borne by the landowner. Williamson voiced the need to address the biology of Forest Health and
30 then later the administrative aspect. Mankowski added that the group is faced with a multi-

1 faceted problem in need of a multi-faceted solution, saying legal, administrative and economical
2 aspects are all relevant.

3
4 **Doug Sutherland speaks:**

5 Sutherland thanked all group members for volunteering to be on the committee. He stated that
6 although the state does not have jurisdiction of federal lands, Forest Health does not know
7 boundaries. Sutherland acknowledged that a wide variety of issues must be addressed. He
8 explained that the west side of the Washington has been working on sustainable harvest
9 calculations. He expressed concerns of forest conditions and posed questions including: What is
10 the desired outcome? How are we going to maintain healthy forests? How are we going to deal
11 with neighbors and communities? How are we going to convince people of the problem? He
12 assured the group that DNR, WDFW, experience, and educational backgrounds among group
13 members will help the group look at all of the issues they are faced with. Sutherland expressed
14 that he is anxious to see the outcome of the group meetings and wishes the group the best.

15
16 **Group Discussion:**

17 McElroy began a group review of the Charter, explaining that it is in a simpler language than Bill
18 6144 and that the listing is not in priority order. In looking at the 9 specific tasks listed, McElroy
19 explained that number 1 relates to an understanding of RCW 76.06 and that the answer does not
20 have to be a straight yes or no. McElroy mentioned that once the group can clearly identify what
21 a resistant and resilient forest would look like, it can develop strategies to achieve it. Ron Shultz
22 advised the group to focus on the desired outcome before jumping into implementation means.
23 McElroy noted that the work group does not have any funding. Blankenship pointed out that
24 incentives come in many forms, such as simplified regulations, not only financial rewards.

25
26 Karl Denison described that the southern United States liability laws of prescribed burns are
27 quite different. Fonda debated with the idea that we can't treat forest fires like structural fires.
28 He emphasized that some of our forests have missed approximately 10 fire cycles, due to the
29 wrong approach to fires by DNR. Fonda suggested that the current approach to wildfire be
30 changed because some fires need to burn naturally. Fonda would like to examine DNR's role as
31 a fire department. Mankowski noted that layers of diverse expectations make useful solutions

1 more difficult. Sutherland mentioned that 150 years ago and earlier, tribes and nature kept some
2 sense of balance in forests and that we no longer have the ability to maintain healthy forests. He
3 stated that as a result of population and structural growth, there is a need to replace “natural
4 processes”. Gara reiterated the link between fire, wind, insects and disease and the causes and
5 interactions among them. Heide pointed out that there is a variety of ownership and management
6 objectives and that the group needs to deal with the forest health issue with all objectives in
7 mind. Blankenship noted that he relies on DNR to fight fires for public safety. McElroy stated
8 that DNR fire staff worked with the forest service to calculate an average of 160,000 acres of
9 state protected timber land burned each year prior to European settlement. Less than 20,000
10 acres burn per year today.

11
12 After lunch, McElroy summarized the morning discussions and stated that we need to reach
13 agreement on what a healthy forest is and looks like. He said we should look at whether or not
14 our forests are healthy today and if they’re unhealthy what are the factors that lead to the
15 unhealthy state? How can we make our forests healthy? How do we approach this from a
16 landowner’s objective and standpoint? What impediments and opportunities do we recognize?
17 What if landowners don’t have the means to achieve the goal(s)? Williamson added the concept
18 of risk assessment, because he envisions a tiered approach and that with mechanisms in place to
19 monitor the process we could determine a trend line of forests. Lippke stated that we have no
20 ongoing assessment process to characterize forest health issues and increase general awareness.

21
22 Heide voiced concern about the group tasks, asking what if people don’t comply? McElroy
23 elaborated with the question what is a logical response to those who don’t comply? He added
24 that scale will be a factor because of differences in responses and that the system must work
25 across the landscape to deal with vastly different forests and landowners. Fonda asked for
26 clarification on the terms resilience and resistance because he feels they are opposites. McElroy
27 defined resilience as a forest that is in a condition so that it is able to resist major damage from
28 wind, fire, ice, insects and disease and that it’s resilient in that it can respond to changes in
29 climate and environment. Fonda explained he associates resistance with stability and
30 homeostasis; all species respond to minor environmental perturbations and individual organisms
31 survive. Fonda thinks of resilience as the capability for a forest community to re-establish itself

1 after individual organisms are killed by the disturbance. The concept of resistance works better
2 in eastern Washington; the concept of resilience works better in Douglas-fir forests of the
3 Olympic Peninsula.

4
5 **Action:** Fonda requested that the group visit a healthy forest and an unhealthy forest to actually
6 see the different characteristics. McElroy & Ripley said that they would look into scheduling a
7 field trip as part of the June meeting, possibly making it a two day meeting. St. Pierre offered to
8 host a field trip.

9 **Action:** DNR Staff will create a map and/or list of biomes (ie: forest types of concern).

10 **Action:** Ripley, Fonda and Lippke will create a list of characteristics and/or compile
11 photographs of healthy versus unhealthy forests.

12 13 **Group Discussion:**

14 St. Pierre explained that there is a range we need to live within, the group should try to determine
15 what that range is, and to do so we might realize that there are things that might need to be let go
16 of. Petersen noted that the challenge is the state doesn't want to see bunches of dead trees and
17 their objective is focused on school trusts. McElroy recognized that we are dealing with native
18 insects and disease, which have greatly exceeded normal outbreaks because of the current forest
19 conditions. He added that there will always be dead trees, but that we need to keep the damage
20 within reasonable bounds. Ripley suggested that the group look at information about forest
21 conditions 100 years ago for quantitative purposes. The group discussed potential geographic
22 scales for forest health standards. McElroy confirmed for Heide that the legislature charges the
23 group to look at all of Washington lands, not just state lands. Williamson specified that a
24 particular legislator in northeast Washington expects to be given a process he can use now to get
25 rid of Douglas-fir bark beetles, telling the group that we need to address long term goals but
26 short term goals are relevant too.

27
28 Ripley informed the group that there is a need to elaborate on the Charter and Task List as a
29 group. It was agreed that the purpose needs to be expanded to include that as well as assisting
30 Sutherland with a forest health plan, the group needs to submit committee recommendations to
31 the Legislature regarding legislation needed to implement its findings. After reviewing section 4

1 of Bill 6144 as a group it was determined that the group's purpose is to help Sutherland develop
2 a strategic plan to solve forest health issues statewide and to study opportunities for improving
3 forest health. The plan will likely contain elements of monitoring, funding, public involvement,
4 DNR service delivery, recommendations for dealing with federal lands, and implementation.

5
6 McElroy pointed out that item G in Bill 6144 is specific to salvage removal of damaged trees. It
7 is concerned with how landowners will be able to comply with current forest practice laws while
8 implementing our proposed process.

9
10 Gara requested that a sentence such as "To develop a set of policies that are biome specific to
11 mitigate or prevent forest health problems across forests of the state" be added to the Charter
12 purpose statement. McElroy will try to incorporate Gara's idea.

13
14 **Action:** McElroy and Ripley will propose a new purpose statement at the June meeting.

15
16 The group agreed that achieving an understanding of what a healthy forest is should be added to
17 the list of group tasks. This will also include the tasks of determining where unhealthy forests
18 occur, what conditions led to a forest's unhealthy state, and what it would take to restore the
19 forest to a healthy state. Sections 1 and 2 of Bill 6144 define an unhealthy forest, but Denison
20 observed that it does not include a concept of scale and asked what scale do we plan to
21 implement? Fonda requested that the task lists document be line numbered and all handouts
22 have page numbers depicted for easier reference. McElroy asked group members to share their
23 perspective at the next meeting if they have an area of expertise in regards to the small bulleted
24 tasks on the Group Task List.

25
26 **Action:** McElroy & Ripley will line number and re-order tasks list prior to the June meeting.

27 **Action:** Ripley will ensure that future documents used by the work group have page numbers.

28
29 **Group Discussion:**

1 Discussion of interconnectedness of wildlife to forests concluded with an agreement that this
2 group is meant to address insects, disease, fire, ice, and wind risks. Wildlife concerns are not a
3 priority for this group now, but consequences to wildlife may need to be addressed.
4

5 An overview of the draft agenda for June's meeting concluded that the group is not ready to
6 review the RCW's in June and instead will need to add a discussion of healthy vs. unhealthy
7 forests. Ripley asked that Mankowski, Williamson, St. Pierre and Tveit each recruit a
8 spokesperson to brief the group with their perspective and view of Forest Health in the form of a
9 15-20 minute presentation.
10

11 **Action:** McElroy & Ripley will re-order and finalize the agenda for the meeting in June.

12 **Action:** As per June meeting agenda, work group members will prepare presentations of their
13 groups' view of forest health.
14

15 **Group Discussion:**

16 McElroy asked members to approve the proposed meeting dates and locations. There was some
17 discussion of October's meeting date. He also welcomed all members to attend the Forest
18 Practices Board meeting in Hood River June 2nd and 3rd because the field trip to the Klickitat
19 would be beneficial in viewing different forest conditions.
20

21 **Action:** McElroy will update list of future meeting dates and locations.
22

23 **Group Discussion:**

24 McElroy and Ripley led a discussion to get group members to identify stakeholders and outreach
25 needs. Fonda asked how the State and National Parks fit in to which McElroy stated they are
26 stakeholders. McElroy emphasized that the public is invited to the group meetings and is
27 welcome to know the progress of the group. Heide recommended that a Forest Health Strategy
28 Work Group (FHSWG) newsletter be created and distributed. McElroy commented that
29 mailings are expensive, but that it would be possible to use the DNR Forest Health website to
30 post meeting minutes and other important FHSWG information.
31

1 **Action:** DNR Staff will create a group member list without contact information, available for
2 public distribution and website posting.

3 **Action:** May 18th meeting minutes will promptly be distributed and posted, upon approval by
4 McElroy.

5
6 **Discussion:**

7 McElroy told group members that assuming that the group is subject to the open public meeting
8 act, members can not communicate as a group outside of group meetings. Group e-mails and
9 correspondence will have to go through Ripley, so that she can distribute the correspondence
10 properly.

11
12 The meeting adjourned at 4:05 pm.